

VZCZCXR08888
RR RUEHDU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHLS #1302/01 2681232
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 251232Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3217
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LUSAKA 001302

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ZA](#)
SUBJECT: ZAMBIAN ELECTIONS - INDEPENDENT DAILY NEWSPAPER
ATTACKS SATA

REF: A. LUSAKA 1264
[1B.](#) 05 LUSAKA 1581

[¶](#)1. (SBU) Summary and introduction. Zambia's only independent daily newspaper, The Post, whose editor Fred M'membe has been jailed for his editorial criticism of President Mwanawasa (Ref B), has taken an increasingly harder line against presidential candidate Michael Sata as election day nears. A number of recent editorials in the paper have harshly criticized Sata's promise to drop corruption charges against his political supporters, notably former President Frederick Chiluba, former Intelligence boss Xavier Chungu, and others. The Post has not given an outright endorsement to any candidate, but its sharp attacks on Sata may help ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) President Mwanawasa's candidacy. M'membe may have come to the conclusion that Mwanawasa is the lesser of two evils. It is not clear how strong an impact the editorials will have on voters, because the majority of Zambians regularly get their news and information by radio rather than through the print media. End summary and introduction.

[¶](#)2. (U) From mid-September onwards, editorials in Zambia's sole independent daily newspaper, The Post, have criticized Patriotic Front presidential candidate Michael Sata with increasing vigor. On September 14, the editorial, entitled "Sata is not our messiah," criticized Sata's pledge to stop the prosecutions for corrupt activity of former Zambian president Frederick Chiluba, former Chief of Intelligence Xavier Chungu, Access Financial Services CEO Faustin Kabwe and others, noting "it is not difficult for anyone to realize or guess why Mr. Sata today has become the most ardent defender of people who plundered public resources. This is simply because they are his financiers." The column also noted, "in 2001 we saw Sata as national secretary of the MMD unleash a corruption-funded thuggery on Chiluba's political opponents within the MMD. Ministers who did not agree with the third-term campaign--which Sata was championing--were being beaten and harassed in all sorts of ways Mr. Sata defended Chiluba at a time when an impeachment motion was filed against him. His defence of Chiluba had nothing to do with principle. He was positioning himself to be anointed as successor."

[¶](#)3. (U) After Chiluba's formal endorsement of Sata's campaign for president was announced and covered in the local media on September 18, the Post attacked Chiluba more directly. On September 20, the daily's banner headline quoted former minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Dipak Patel: "Chiluba and his Crooks Must Be Stopped--Dipak" and its editorial, entitled "We shouldn't vote for corruption" began with: "What makes these plunderers think that the same Zambian people who in 2002 wanted Frederick Chiluba's immunity removed so that he could be prosecuted together with his tandem of thieves have changed their minds and want them back in power?" The editorial also noted, "Sata and Chiluba should not forget that it is these same Zambians that they

are trying to abuse that stopped their third term bid. They tried every trick in the book but it did not work. The question we must ask is why are they so confident that Zambians have forgotten? How can a thief like Chiluba stand on a platform and energetically declare--with a clenched fist (the PF symbol) that Zambians should vote for Sata because he has suffered enough...We must all realize that if we don't all do our part to stop this nonsense, the criminals will be back with a vengeance, controlling the instruments of power. That's all they want. It is our collective duty to fight this corruption that is about to reinstate itself. We have a citizenry responsibility not to vote for corruption."

¶ 4. (U) On September 21, the Post recalled a Chiluba-era scandal with its front-page headline, "Chiluba was behind Maize Scam-Mahtani" and the editorial, entitled "Twachula Pafula" (we have suffered a lot) read: "Those who thought the Zambian people are fools and can be endlessly manipulated are in for a rude awakening or shock...Frederick Chiluba thought his cheap propaganda would be received favourably by the Zambian people...(but) the Zambian people know Chiluba for what he is - a crook, a demagogue." The editorial lists a number of verbal attacks Sata made on Chiluba's corruption in 2002, 2003, and 2004, and then notes, "They (Sata and PF General Secretary Guy Scott) are saying they are going to pardon plunderers, what kind of nonsense is this? If, as they want the public to believe, they want to work for the lowly people of our society, what about the other prisoners who are in jail-people who stole a loaf of bread? Is this the kind of government they want to give our people? The more you steal the better you are treated!"

¶ 5. (U) On September 22, the Post editorial, "Cheap demagogic," began with: "We have said it before and we say it

LUSAKA 00001302 002 OF 002

again -with absolute honesty and total conviction-that Frederick Chiluba is a shameless thief." It also attacks Michael Sata: "Zambians should not be cheated by the demagogic that Sata is engaging in. This man will say anything to be elected but Zambians will not be fooled. Today Sata and Chiluba want to pretend that Chiluba's case is not finished because the prosecution have failed. What nonsense! It is because of these cheap lies and propaganda of the plunderers and their accomplices that this newspaper took the expensive decision of publishing the court proceedings in full-verbatim. We want the Zambian people to read for themselves and see what the plunderers did and are saying. Our archives show that Chiluba and his tandem of thieves have used every trick in the book to delay the court cases. It is nonsense to suggest that they are innocent because no court has convicted them. Sata's defence of the plunderers is nothing but cheap demagogic."

¶ 6. (U) September 25's front page headline in the Post heralded Sata's "U-Turn" on his pledge to halt corruption prosecutions, reporting that Sata stated he would not stop the fight against corruption, and that he would seek "justice." The editorial, "Watch satanic deeds," comments that Sata's "apparent U-turn on this subject cannot fool us. It goes to prove everything we have been saying. This man has no principles. It is the same mouth that only yesterday was promising to defend Chiluba that is today saying he will not defend him and his fellow plunderers. Why?... It is clear Sata will say anything if it helps him get elected...this is why people must listen very carefully to the promises Sata is making. They must ask themselves 'what is this man's true legacy?' It is true he has done some good here and there. But his destructive traits far outweigh any benefits. Who wants to return to the vigilante days? Who want to return to the days when the corrupt, the crooked and the most shrewd reign supreme?...No one should believe the satanic pie in the sky promises. We all know this man and his satanic deeds. His deeds are there for all to see. They speak of him and who he is. Watch satanic deeds."

¶7. (SBU) Comment. Post editor, Fred M'membe, has long been a thorn in the side of President Mwanawasa--so much so that he was charged with defamation of the president and jailed in November 2005 (though the charges were dropped, quietly, in February 2006). His harsh criticism of Mwanawasa's closest contender in the presidential race demonstrates a growing concern over Sata's increasing popularity, and likely, M'membe's calculation that a second term for Mwanawasa would be the lesser of two evils. It is not clear if the Post's strong editorial stance against Sata will sway many voters. Although the Post enjoys a larger circulation and readership than either of the two state-run daily newspapers, a 2005 Afrobarometer survey indicates that Zambians are more likely to get their news daily or several times a week from the radio (81 percent) than from TV (39 percent) or newspapers (24 percent). In addition, an opinion poll by the Steadman Group released in early September 2006 (Ref A) indicated that corruption was not considered an important issue by a majority of Zambian voters.

MARTINEZ